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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0761
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 0497

UNCLAS HANOI 000326

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EAP/MLS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PGOV SOCI KISL KPAO XF VM
SUBJECT: CARTOON CONTROVERSY: GVN CONDEMNS VIOLENCE;
VIETNAMESE MUSLIMS QUIESCENT

Ref: State 20587

¶11. (SBU) Pol/C met with MFA West Asia and Africa Department Deputy Director General Duong Huynh Lap February 14 to deliver reftel points. Lap relayed the GVN's regret at both the offensive cartoons and the violence they generated. Vietnam believes that this matter should be resolved through dialogue in the spirit of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. While most Muslims worldwide have adopted a moderate approach to this controversy, care still needs to be taken to ensure that radicals and extremists do not exploit the situation to their benefit. Lap noted that Vietnam's some 100,000 Muslims, who live mostly in the south-central coastal area and Mekong Delta, have not had much of a reaction to the controversy. "They are generally very calm when it comes to things like this," Lap reported.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: We note that while DDG Lap expansively addressed the issues surrounding the reaction of Muslims to the cartoons, he studiously avoided the issues of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Nonetheless, based on our own observations, we agree with his assertion that the reaction in Vietnam, both from the nation's Muslims and in the official press, has been muted. While the local media has reported almost daily on the Muslim reaction to the cartoons, most stories have been translations of articles in international media (Reuters, AFP), and do not include editorial commentary. End Comment.

BOARDMAN